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ABSTRACT

Mastery learning is a systematic approach to instruction in which students are required to attain specified levels of competence. This paper provides a rationale for using mastery learning in the introductory public speaking course and clarifies the differences between traditional and mastery learning approaches by contrasting their assumptions and applications with regard to public speaking. It then examines four elements involved in designing and implementing a mastery learning approach: (1) writing performance objectives; (2) dividing the course into small units, ordering them, and sequencing the tasks; (3) selecting basic instructional procedures; and (4) developing methods through which students can demonstrate and be evaluated on mastery of the course learning objectives. The paper provides an illustration of one way in which units of study could be formulated and sequenced; sample objectives for each unit proposed are included. (GW)

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TEACHING PUBLIC SPEAKING ON A MASTERY LEARNING BASIS

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Abstract

This article provides a rationale for using a mastery learning approach in the college introductory public speaking course, identifies the differences between traditional and mastery learning approaches to public speaking by contrasting the assumptions and applications of both, and identifies and describes procedures for teaching public speaking on a mastery learning basis.

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Mastery learning (ML) is a systematic approach to instruction which attempts to maximize learning by requiring that students attain specified levels of competence. The conceptual basis and rationale for this system of instruction have recently been set forth in the speech communication literature.[1] Yet to be considered, however, is the specific application of ML to speech communication instruction.

Despite the emphasis on the study of interpersonal communication in recent years, public speaking continues to be viewed as an important communication competence by members of the speech communication profession.[2] Because public speaking is frequently taught in the basic course at the college level, it seems worthwhile to consider if there are advantages for using a ML approach to develop competence in public speaking, and if so, to examine how such an approach could be implemented. To this end, this article will (1) provide a rationale for using ML in the introductory public speaking course; (2) clarify the differences between traditional and ML approaches to public speaking by contrasting the assumptions and applications of both; and (3) identify and describe procedures for teaching public speaking on a ML basis.

A Rationale

The advantages of using ML in an introductory public speaking course can be discussed in terms of cognitive learning outcomes, affective outcomes, and the unique characteristics of public speaking.

While no specific study of the effects of ML on achievement in public speaking could be found, investigations of the effects of ML based approaches on cognitive learning across a wide variety of subject matter indicate that ML can work better than traditional approaches. From Block's exhaustive review of empirical studies, it is concluded that ML can yield greater achievement, retention and transfer of learning than comparable nonmastery approaches.[3]

The second major reason for implementing a ML approach concerns affective outcomes of instruction. Under a ML approach, a course is divided into many small units and for each unit students are provided with several opportunities to achieve mastery. Research has shown that given sufficient time and opportunity, all, or almost all, students are able to succeed. Bloom[4] and Block[5] have identified four consequences of such success: First, success generates high levels of student interest in the subject matter. Second, and closely related to interest, is attitude toward future learning. Success on one task leads to greater enthusiasm for the next. Third, with regard to self-concept, numerous investigations have shown that success on learning tasks can enhance a student's self-esteem, while failure can produce opposite results. Finally, available research has indicated that students seem to enjoy mastery approaches to learning more than traditional ones. These four affective outcomes of ML appear to be important and provide additional support for implementing this strategy.

Two final reasons for implementing ML concern the very nature of public speaking. First, giving a speech requires the student to be on public display, with the result that any mistakes or shortcomings are visible to peers. Hence, it is to be expected that speaking before an audience is a highly ego-involving activity, potentially more threatening for many students than writing a paper or taking a test. For this reason, it seems likely that students who fail in public performances might suffer a greater loss of interest, positive attitude toward the course, and self-esteem than those who fail in a private, written task. Since the ML approach provides maximum opportunity for students to succeed, it is more desirable on this basis alone than traditional approaches which make no such provision. Second, learning how to deliver an effective speech is a sequential task. Examination of several public speaking texts

reveals that the task of speech preparation and composition consists of many small components.[6] There is a logical sequence to follow and the tasks build on one another. Because one of the most distinctive features of the ML approach is the dividing of courses into small units which can be logically sequenced, a course in public speaking seems especially well suited to this approach. In summary, available research has indicated that greater cognitive learning and more positive affective outcomes can occur for students learning by ML strategies than by more traditional approaches. Furthermore, because it is very important for students to experience success in giving speeches, and because the task of speech preparation and presentation consists of subtasks which can be separated and sequenced, instruction in public speaking seems well suited for ML.

Comparison of Traditional and Mastery Learning Approaches to Public Speaking Instruction

Having considered a rationale for ML, we will now attempt to clarify differences between traditional and ML approaches to public speaking instruction. This may best be accomplished by contrasting the basic assumptions and applications of the two systems. It is recognized, of course, that not all statements in Figure 1 apply to every traditionally oriented course nor to every course based on ML principles.[7]

Figure 1 goes about here

Implementing a Mastery Learning Approach

Having provided an overview of fundamental differences in traditional and ML approaches, we now give attention to the task of designing and implementing a ML approach. The task involves four basic elements: (1) writing performance objectives; (2) dividing the course into small units, ordering them, and

sequencing the tasks; (3) selecting basic instructional procedures; and (4) developing evaluations.

Writing Performance Objectives

Because writing objectives is such a time-consuming task, we suggest teachers first examine examples of objectives written by others. A survey of recent introductory speech texts reveals six which include objectives for public speaking.[8] Fletcher's book is devoted solely to public speaking. Hughey and Johnson include a chapter on public speaking. These two texts provided the most detailed objectives of the six sources. Finally, four additional sources provide examples of objectives.[9] The objectives discussed by Haynes provide perhaps the best example of objectives that are written in specific behavioral terms.

After considering the objectives suggested by others, the teacher can select and/or create objectives most appropriate for his particular course. For the teacher who seeks assistance in writing statements of objectives, excellent resources are available.[10]

Once objectives for the course have been identified, it is necessary to group the objectives and sequence them. This task is considered in the following section.

Sequencing the Course Units

The task of sequencing requires that the teacher divide the skills to be mastered into subskills and determine the logical order in which the student is to learn them. For the instructor desiring general information about learning hierarchies, Gagné is a source to consult.[11] Haynes discusses Gagné's theory as it applies to public speaking instruction in organization of a speech.[12] Her article provides a rationale for conducting a hierarchical analysis and gives guidelines and examples as well.

Three additional sources may be of practical value to the instructor of public speaking.[13] The paper by Parks demonstrates a task analysis for teaching the organization of an informative speech. She structures the behaviors into a hierarchy of task and subtasks. Although the paper deals with only one unit, organization of a speech, it provides a detailed example of how to sequence tasks. The Hughey and Johnson text provides a learning sequence for public speaking which, although not detailed, should prove helpful. Fletcher divides the study of public speaking into 14 units with 58 specific criteria. Since he focuses on the whole of public speaking, this text is of particular value. After referring to various sources, it is necessary for the individual teacher to determine the order of tasks and decide which skills are prerequisite and must be mastered in order to continue.

Figure 2 provides an illustration of one way in which units of study could be formulated and sequenced. The units selected consist of topics treated by virtually all current public speaking texts. Accompanying each unit is one (or more) sample objective.[14]

Insert Figure 2 about here

Once the units have been formulated and sequenced, all that remains is the selection of instructional and evaluative procedures. The process of teaching and testing are much more closely related in a ML system than in traditional systems. Hence, the discussion of the two will be combined in the section which follows.

Instruction and Evaluation

The public speaking class in which a mastery learning approach is used will differ considerably from a traditionally oriented class. While numerous

ways of implementing a ML approach are possible, the system described below is similar (but not identical) to that recommended by Keller and Sherman.[15]

At the beginning of the course each student completes a written pretest consisting of at least one item for each of the cognitive learning course objectives. Students who achieve the minimal acceptable score on the pretest are then permitted to attempt an oral performance test (i.e., presentation of an informative as well as a persuasive speech). The presentations are evaluated by the instructor on the basis of each of the oral performance course objectives. Students achieving the minimal level of performance are given credit for the course and required to do no additional assignments.[16] Students not demonstrating mastery on the pretest begin work on Unit I.

For each unit the instructor should provide students with a handout which contains a statement of the overall purpose of the unit and its importance, the objectives and the assigned readings. Each unit will have two types of objectives, those for which mastery must be demonstrated on a written test and those which require the student to demonstrate learning through an oral presentation. The reasoning underlying the use of objectives which require written as well as oral performance is as follows: The terminal objective for each unit requires the student to give a speech in which the student demonstrates that he is able to apply the principles of speech composition or delivery contained within the unit. Experience has confirmed for us the following common sense expectation: If a student has achieved a cognitive understanding of principles of effective public speaking (e.g., organization), he is more likely to be successful in using these principles in making a speech than if he had not achieved such understanding. Therefore, every student is required to first demonstrate mastery on a written test before being allowed to attempt the oral performance objectives of the unit. When a student feels he has learned

the material, that student goes to a proctor to take the unit test.[17] The test is short and objective in nature, and is graded by the proctor as soon as the student completes it. In this way the student receives immediate feedback concerning performance. The proctor can discuss with the student any answer that is incorrect, and the student may defend an answer that the proctor marked as incorrect with the course instructor making the final judgment. If the student fails to master the unit, he may be told to study the material again, or may be given alternative materials to study, or may be assigned to study with others, etc. The student is not penalized for failure to pass a test and is allowed to repeat it as many times as necessary.

After demonstrating mastery of the unit's cognitive learning objectives, students begin preparation of the oral assignment. The oral tasks consist of giving speeches. The terminal objective for each of nine units is to give a speech. It is believed that a student should not be evaluated on an entire speech until he has received instruction on every aspect of speech making.[18] Therefore, although students begin giving speeches early in the semester, each speech is evaluated only on those aspects (units) that the student has mastered up to that point. For example, since organizing the body of a speech is not covered until Unit V, a speech given on Unit I is not evaluated on organization, but only on maintaining eye contact and speaking clearly without nervousness. Evaluation is cumulative, however, in the sense that a speech on Unit III is evaluated on all aspects covered in Units I, II, as well as III. This approach seems an equitable one for students, in that they are not evaluated on points for which they have received no instruction, and one that avoids the artificiality of having students give only segments of a speech early in the semester (e.g., introduction of a speech). This method allows for students to practice speaking throughout the duration of the semester.

When students are ready to give a speech, they notify a proctor and sign up for a speaking time. Speaking sessions are held frequently, with approximately five or six students and one proctor in a group.[19] This system allows for students to speak when they believe they are prepared, as well as the opportunity to speak to a diversity of listeners. Because speaking sessions are frequent, a student who does not achieve a mastery level the first time has numerous opportunities to try again. Since students are evaluated on aspects of the particular unit of concern (and those previously mastered) each student tells the proctor at what level he is working in order to be evaluated accordingly. In this way, students who are working at various levels of progression come together in the same group to give speeches. The proctor evaluates each speech and gives students immediate feedback. A written critique in the form of an evaluation sheet with space for additional comments is suggested. A student who performs to the specified level of mastery progresses to the next unit. A student who does not perfrom successfully is recycled, given corrective instruction, and is allowed to give the speech again.

Level of mastery and grading. The speech composition and presentation skills required for each of the nine units identified earlier are considered to be "basic" to effective public speaking. Hence, we suggest that to receive the grade of "C" (i.e., satisfactory) for the course, a student should complete all nine units. Because students are given multiple opportunities on both written tests and oral presentations, it is not unreasonable to insist upon high levels of achievement. Typically in ML courses students are required to achieve no less than ninety percent correct answers on tests and we suggest this standard be employed for unit objective (i.e., written) examinations. Because of the difficulty in determining what constitutes 90% correct in an oral presentation, however, a different definition of mastery is proposed. We

suggest that a student's performance on each oral presentation objective be evaluated as either "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory," with an evaluation of "satisfactory" required on each objective for a given unit (as well as for all objectives previously mastered) before the student is permitted to continue to a new unit.

Having specified what constitutes "C" level work, it is necessary to consider how performance less than and greater than the minimally acceptable level should be evaluated. Our preference is to give a grade of "incomplete" to any student who fails to complete all nine units. The policies of one's institution and one's personal philosophy would of necessity, however, influence this decision, and the teacher could assign the grade of "D" (i.e., unsatisfactory, but passing) for satisfactory completion of some fewer number of units than nine. For the student who seeks more than a "C" we would suggest the following: For the grade of "A" the student must complete all nine units and also present two additional informative and two additional persuasive speeches which meet the criteria required for the ninth unit. For the grade of "B" the student must complete all nine units and present one additional informative and one additional persuasive speech which meet the criteria for the ninth unit. Hence, the exceptionally talented or industrious student is able to earn a grade higher than "C" for the course by making further application of the principles learned in the nine core units.

Conclusion

We have attempted to show in this article that ML is a viable alternative for increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of public speaking instruction. Thirteen contrasts were offered to illustrate how the mastery and traditional approaches differed with respect to important assumptions and applications.

Examination of these contrasts reveals what we consider to be the major advantages to be obtained from the use of the ML approach proposed: (1) Through the use of performance objectives students are aware of what they must do and the purpose of evaluations. (2) The complexity of public speaking is greatly reduced because students focus on small segments of the task of composition and presentation while continuing to use previously acquired skills and knowledge as they move toward the ultimate goal of integrating each of the subcompetencies into an effective presentation. (3) Because proctors listen to speeches, students can give more presentations (and still receive detailed feedback) than under a traditional system, thus having the opportunity to overcome deficiencies. (4) Students have a high probability of success, and hence are likely to regard their course in public speaking, as well as the field of speech communication, with positive feelings.

Footnotes

[1]See G. Robert Spell, Robert J. Kibler, and Arlie Muller Parks, "A Comparison of Mastery and Traditional Learning Systems with Implications for Communication Instruction," paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Atlanta, April, 1972; Jo Sprague, "Cognitive Skills and Teaching for Mastery," in New Horizons for Teacher Education in Speech Communication, ed. P. Judson Newcombe and R. R. Allen (Skokie, Illinois: National Textbooks, 1974), pp. 74-96; and Michael D. Scott and Thomas J. Young, "Personalizing Communication Instruction," Communication Education, 25 (September 1976), 211-221.

[2]See James W. Gibson, John A. Kline and Charles R. Gruner, "A Re-Examination of the First Course in Speech at U. S. Colleges and Universities," Speech Teacher, 23 (September 1974), 206-214; Jeffrey R. Brosbe, ed., Framework for Speech Communication in California Public Schools: Grades Kindergarten Through Fourteen (California State Speech Council, 1973); and Donald J. Cegala and Ronald E. Bassett, "The Goals of Speech Communication Instruction: The Teacher's Perspective," in Developing Communication Competence in Children, ed. R. R. Allen and Kenneth L. Brown (Skokie, Illinois: National Textbooks, 1976), pp. 225-242.

[3]James H. Block, "Mastery Learning in the Classroom: An Overview of Recent Research," in Schools, Society and Mastery Learning, ed. James H. Block

(New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), pp. 30, 38 and 49. Similar conclusions can be drawn for the effects of Keller's particular form of ML, Personalized System of Instruction, see Scott and Young, 215.

[4]Benjamin S. Bloom, "Mastery Learning," in Mastery Learning: Theory and Practice, ed. James H. Block (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).

[5]Block, "Mastery Learning in the Classroom: An Overview of Recent Research."

[6]See, for example, Glenn R. Capp, Basic Oral Communication (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971); L. Fletcher, How to Design and Deliver a Speech (New York: Chandler, 1973); C. S. Mudd and Malcolm O. Sillars, Speech: Content and Communication (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1975); and Gary Cronkhite, Becoming Aware of Public Speaking (Menlo Park, California: Cummings, 1976).

[7]The statements of assumptions and applications have been adapted from those suggested by Spell, Kibler and Parks.

[8]See John W. Keltner, Interpersonal Speech Communication: Elements and Structures (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1970); Joseph A. DeVito, The Interpersonal Communication Book (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); Abne M. Eisenberg, Living Communication (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1975); Gail E. Myers and Michelle T. Myers, Communicating When We Speak (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975); L. Fletcher, How to Design and Deliver A Speech (New York: Chandler, 1973); and J. D. Hughey and Arlee W. Johnson, Speech Communication: Foundations and Challenges (New York: Macmillan, 1975).

[9]See Robert T. Oliver, "The Eternal (and Infernal) Problem of Grades," Speech Teacher, 9 (January 1960), 8-11; Charles R. Gruner, "Behavioral Objectives for the Grading of Classroom Speeches," Speech Teacher, 17 (September 1968), 207-209; Judy L. Haynes, "Improving Instruction in Speech Communication Skills Through Learning Hierarchies: An Application to Organization," Speech Teacher, 22 (September 1973), 237-243; and Cegala and Bassett, pp. 266-267.

[10]See Robert F. Mager, Preparing Instructional Objectives (Palo Alto, California: Fearon, 1962); and Donald J. Cegala, Robert J. Kibler, Larry L. Barker and David T. Miles, "Writing Behavioral Objectives: A Programmed Article," Speech Teacher, 21 (September 1972), 151-168.

[11]Robert M. Gagné, "Learning Hierarchies," Educational Psychologist, 6 (1968), 1-9.

[12]Haynes.

[13]Fletcher; Arlie M. Parks, "A Task Analysis for Teaching the Organization of a Speech," March, 1974. ERIC ED 090 597; and Hughey and Johnson, p. 346.

[14]The objectives are not intended to serve as models of complete statements of performance objectives, rather, their purpose is to provide information about the instructional purposes of the various units.

[15]See Fred S. Keller and J. Gilmour Sherman, The Keller Plan Handbook (Menlo Park, California: W. A. Benjamin, 1974). Because of space limitations it is not possible to explain in detail each of the instructional and evaluation procedures and their rationale. Sources in which such explanations can be

found, however, will be indicated in footnotes. An excellent summary of Keller's method may be found in Scott and Young, "Personalizing Communication Instruction."

[16]For additional information on pretesting for both cognitive and psychomotor objectives, see Gayle K. Levinson, "The Basic Speech Communication Course: Establishing Minimal Oral Competencies and Exemption Procedures," Communication Education, 25 (September 1976), 222-230.

[17]The proctor is an undergraduate student who has completed the course in a previous term with the grade of "A", and who is given credit under a special course listing for serving in this capacity for the term. For additional information on the role of proctors see Keller and Sherman, pp. 15-18.

[18]A rationale for this decision was provided by Paul D. Holtzman, "Speech Criticism and Evaluation as Communication," Speech Teacher, 9 (January 1960), 1-7.

[19]It is suggested that an appropriate proctor-student ratio for the course is approximately one to eight.

Figure 1

Contrasting Assumptions and Applications of Traditional and Mastery Learning Approaches to Public Speaking Instruction

Traditional Approach	Mastery Learning Approach
1. The assumption is that students enter the course with the same public speaking competencies and experience in speaking.	1. The assumption is that students enter the course at various levels of public speaking competence and experience.
2. All students begin work at the same level and on the same unit of instruction.	2. Students are pretested to determine competencies, and then begin work at an appropriate level and unit of instruction.
3. Course objectives are stated in terms of the number of speeches to be given and the material to be covered.	3. Course objectives are stated behaviorally in terms of the terminal performance to be achieved.
4. The teacher's role is primarily that of information dispenser and critic.	4. The teacher's role is primarily that of learning facilitator and manager, one who writes objectives, selects materials, and develops learning strategies.
5. The lecture is the typical instructional strategy used, and it is geared to reach the majority of students, the "average" ones.	5. Various instructional strategies are selected to meet the needs of individual students. In addition to lecture, such strategies include small group study, tutorial help, workbook and programmed instruction, and audio-visual aids.
6. Material is taught according to chapter sequence.	6. Material is broken into small units and taught according to logical sequence.
7. Student speeches and test performances are evaluated on the basis of peer comparisons (norm-referenced).	7. Student speeches and tests are evaluated on the basis of the behavioral objectives (criterion-referenced).
8. The classroom atmosphere is one of competition for grades.	8. The classroom atmosphere is one of cooperation, since it is expected that most students will achieve mastery.

Traditional Approach	Mastery Learning Approach
9. Periodic tests are given for the purpose of assigning grades. Students are not allowed to repeat a test and must continue in the course even though mastery has not been achieved.	9. Tests are given upon completion of each unit to determine the student's level of mastery. If mastery has been achieved, the student continues; if not, the student is given corrective instruction until the unit is mastered.
10. Speeches are evaluated on all components before students receive instruction related to the components.	10. Speeches are evaluated only on components for which students have received instruction.
11. A student who gives an "unacceptable" speech receives a low grade, is not allowed to repeat the speech, and must continue in the course.	11. A student who gives an "unacceptable" speech is given corrective instruction and must give an "acceptable" speech before attempting new objectives.
12. Because the teacher is the one who listens to and evaluates all speeches, there is not time for students to give speeches again.	12. Proctors are used to listen to speeches and give help to those students who need it. With several proctors, it is possible for students to repeat until they achieve mastery.
13. All students are expected to do the same amount of work (i.e., give the same number and type of speeches).	13. "Advanced" students, after achieving a minimum level of mastery, may continue to give additional speeches.

Figure 2

Units and Sample Objectives for Oral Performance

Unit I: Overview - Speaking Before an Audience

Objective:

Introduce yourself to the class in a two minute speech during which you:

(a) establish and maintain eye contact with listeners;

(b) speak distinctly and with adequate volume; and

(c) do not show signs of excessive nervousness.

Unit II: Analysis of Audience and Occasion

Objective:

After attending a meeting of a community or campus group in which a public speech was given, deliver to the class a five minute presentation in which you:

(a) name the group;

(b) analyze the group, identifying interests, attitudes, age, sex, educational levels, occupations, and any other salient characteristics; and

(c) identify the purpose of the occasion, physical conditions, facilities, and size of audience.

Unit III: Selecting Topics and Purposes

Objective:

After attending a meeting of a community or campus group, assume that you have been invited to address the group, and deliver to the class a five minute presentation in which you:

(a) identify an appropriate topic for the speech and give reasons for the topic selection; and

(b) identify an appropriate purpose for the speech, general and specific, and give justification for the selected purpose.

Unit IV: Selecting Main Ideas and Supporting Them

Objective:

Deliver a five minute speech on a topic of your choice in which you support the main idea using at least three of the following forms: explanation, statistics, examples, analogy, testimony, audio-visual aid.

Unit V: Organizing the Body of a Speech

Objective:

Deliver a five minute speech on a topic of your choice in which you organize your speech according to one of the following patterns: deductive, inductive, problem-cause-solution, chronological, enumeration, logical, cause-to-effect, simple-to-complex.

Unit VI: Preparing the Introduction

Objective:

Deliver a five minute speech on a topic of your choice in which your introduction:

(a) performs three functions: creates a favorable atmosphere for the speech; stimulates interest in the topic; and clarifies and partitions the topic; and

(b) uses one of the following forms: a stimulating question, an illustration or narrative, humor, a quotation, an unusual statement.

Unit VII: Preparing the Conclusion

Objective:

Deliver a five minute speech on a topic of your choice in which your conclusion:

(a) rounds out the central idea and purpose; and

(b) makes use of one or a combination of the following methods: summary of main points, amplification of central idea, indication of desired action.

Unit VIII: Informative Speaking - Demonstration

Objective:

Deliver a five minute informative speech in which you demonstrate with use of a visual aid one of the following: how a theory, principle, or mechanism operates; how to perform an activity; how to construct something.

Unit IX: Persuasive Speaking

Objective:

Deliver a five minute persuasive speech in which you:

(a) attempt to change listeners' attitudes or behavior; and

(b) use each of the following types of appeals: logical, emotional, ethical.